



" Speak gently to the erring !

For is it not enough,

That innocence and peace have gone,

Without the censure rough ?

It sure must be a weary lot,

That sin-stain'd heart to bear,

And they who share a happier fate,

Their chidings well may spare.

" Speak gently to the erring !

Thou yet may'st lead them back,

With holy words, and tones of love,

From misery's thorny track.

Forget not thou hast often sinn'd,

And sinful yet must be :

Deal gently with the erring,

As God hath dwelt with thee."

REVIEW OF SOME PROVISIONS
OF THE PROPOSED
NEW CONSTITUTION AND DISCIPLINE
OF THE
REMONSTRANT SYNOD OF ULSTER:

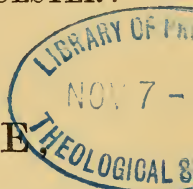
A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE MEMBERS OF THE REMONSTRANT
CONGREGATION, YORK-STREET, BELFAST, ON SUNDAY, JANUARY 4, 1857,

AND PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST.

BY
DAVID MAGINNIS.

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1857.



THIS WE WILL SAY BOLDLY, AND PROCLAIM TO ALL THE WORLD : WHOEVER PROMOTES OPPRESSION OF CONSCIENCE AND MENTAL SLAVERY—YEA, WHOEVER DOES NOT, WITH ALL SINCERITY AND ENERGY, LABOUR IN FAITH FOR THE FREEDOM OF THE HUMAN CONSCIENCE AND INTELLECT IS WORKING FOR JESUITISM, AND, AS MUCH AS IN HIM LIES, FOR THE DOWNFAL AND DESTRUCTION OF HIS OWN CHURCH AND NATION. BUT IF HE BE A PROTESTANT, HE DESERVES A DOUBLE MEASURE OF OUR ABHORRENCE OR COMPASSION.—*C. C. J. Bunsen.*

TO THE REMONSTRANTS OF 1829,

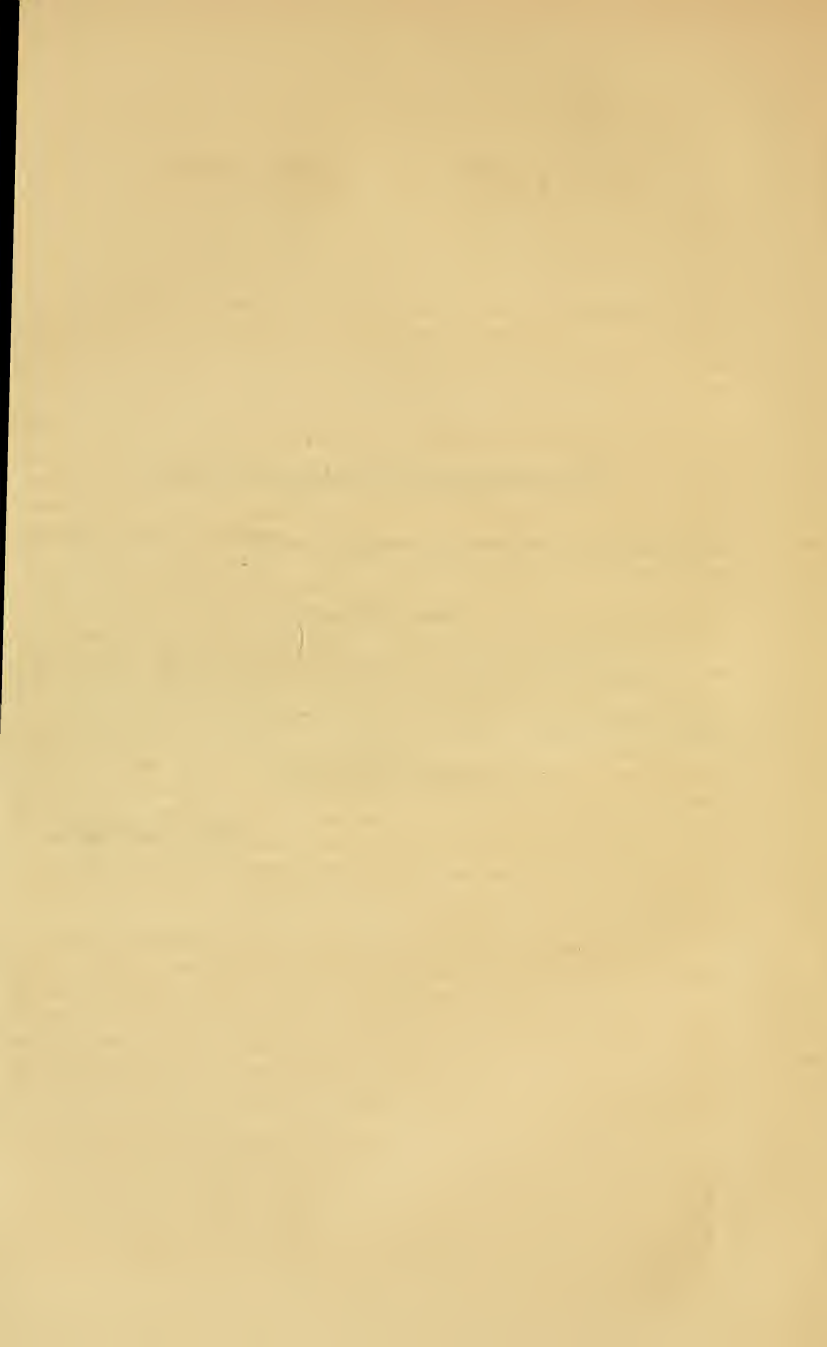
In admiration of their heroic Struggles for Freedom of Conscience,

THIS ATTEMPT

To support the Principles of Religious Liberty which they maintained, and to preserve from Apostacy the Church they founded,

Is gratefully dedicated by

THE AUTHOR.



REVIEW OF NEW CODE.

WHERE THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS, THERE IS LIBERTY.—2 *Cor.* iii. 17.

STAND FAST, THEREFORE, IN THE LIBERTY WHEREWITH CHRIST HATH MADE US FREE, AND BE NOT ENTANGLED AGAIN WITH THE YOKE OF BONDAGE.—*Gal.* v. 1.

OUR Synod has been engaged, of late, in remodelling its Constitution and Discipline.

The Remonstrants, upon first organizing themselves into a distinct Body, deemed it advisable to retain the Code of the Church from which they had separated. The extensive ecclesiastical machinery, however, of the General Synod of Ulster was but ill adapted to the small Remonstrant Synod. Like the armour in which Saul arrayed the stripling shepherd, it was cumbrous. In course of time, its unsuitableness became generally felt ; and, at length, in the year 1848, our Synod appointed a Committee to prepare “a plain, brief, and practical Code of Discipline, adapted to the circumstances of this Church.”*

The draft of the principal part of a new Code was presented by the Committee, at the late Annual Meeting of Synod in July last, and was referred to a Special General Meeting, “to consider its provisions and finally determine as to its adoption.” This meeting was held in November ; but, out of consideration for a respected member, who, in consequence of a severe family bereavement, was no longer able to attend, it was agreed, early in the second session, to adjourn till the beginning of next March.

In consequence, partly, of the interest which has been excited in the subject by the November meeting, but, chiefly, on account of the important principles involved in the issue, I most willingly comply with a request of your Committee to devote this morning’s Discourse to a consideration of some remarkable provisions of the new Code ;—convinced that, when the rights of Conscience and the interests of Truth are being endangered in our Church, as I believe they are,

* The resolution is as follows :—“That a Committee, consisting of two Ministers and two Elders from each Presbytery, be appointed, to meet with all convenient speed, for the purpose of drawing out a plain, brief, and practical Code of Discipline, adapted to the circumstances of this Church ;—the draft of such Code to be printed and transmitted to each Minister and Session, preparatory to its being submitted to this Synod, at the next Annual Meeting, in Belfast.”—*Minutes of Synod*, for 1848, p. 21.

I could not more appropriately nor more profitably introduce our public services of the new year, or of our annual meeting, than by warning you of the danger, and entreating you to unite in earnest and energetic efforts to avert it.

Before proceeding to examine the Sections which I consider particularly objectionable, I wish to observe of the Code, as a whole, that it appears to have been framed in utter forgetfulness or disregard of the instructions of Synod. The Committee was appointed to prepare "a PLAIN, BRIEF, AND PRACTICAL *Code of Discipline, adapted to the circumstances of this Church.*" Obviously, these instructions did not contemplate the production of a voluminous Code. Yet, the Committee's draft already extends to *fifty-three* large octavo pages, and we are promised additional matter sufficient to occupy nearly *twenty* pages more,—which, together, would form a volume of no mean dimensions ;—and all this to regulate the ecclesiastical affairs of a small Body consisting of Twenty-five or six Congregations. It seems to me that what was desired—at all events, what "the circumstances of the Church" suggest—is a few plain Rules for the guidance of Congregations and Presbyteries, principally, in cases of difficulty. Instead of the old Code, with its large body of laws, providing for every possible contingency, and much of which had been long inoperative, Synod wished for a "plain, brief, and practical" one, suited to its own circumstances ; and yet the new Code has chapter for chapter, and almost section for section, with the old one. In fact, it is little more than a new and somewhat improved edition of the obsolete Code.

If our main object in this Discourse permitted us to dwell upon the point now before us, I might easily shew that much of the proposed Code is not at all adapted to "the circumstances of our Church." Among longer passages which might be greatly abridged, if not entirely omitted, the following may be specified :—*The Directory for Public Worship*, extending to nearly *twenty* pages ; the *Form of Proceeding in the Infliction or Removal of Church Censures, &c.*, occupying almost *thirteen* pages ; and a Chapter of *six* pages, devoted, mainly, to shewing that the Presbyterian Form of Church Organization is founded upon Scriptural sanctions.

In reply to the allegation that at least the last-named topic, from its importance, is entitled to the prominence awarded to it, it is sufficient to observe that, while some passages of Scripture may be fairly quoted in support of our Form of Church Government, both Episcopacy and Independency have each its Scripture warrants. The fact is, the New Testament does not authoritatively prescribe,*

* "Neither our Saviour nor his Apostles have left any express and positive ordinances for the administration of the Church ; desiring, perhaps, that that which was intended for every age and condition of man, . . . should have the means of accommodating its external and earthly shape to the various modifications of human polity."—WADDINGTON'S "History of the Church," p. 20.

nor even uniformly support, any one Form of Church Government. Under these circumstances, our Code should not be dogmatical upon this point, nor affect to believe that its polity alone is Scriptural.

The part of the Code to which I have already referred as being particularly objectionable, and upon the consideration of which we now enter, is that relating to the preparation of Candidates for the Ministry. For the information of those who have not seen the new Code (of which but a few copies are in circulation), I shall here quote, at full length, the Section which treats of "License," and the principal provisions relating to "Ordination."

"1. When a Presbytery expect to license any candidate at a succeeding meeting, they shall specially appoint a Minister to deliver such license in public, in order that a service so important may be conducted in a solemn and effective manner.

"2. Presbyteries, before they license a candidate to preach the Gospel, shall *satisfy themselves as to his belief* in the divine origin and authority of Christianity. The following questions shall be put :—

"Do you believe in one God, the Creator and Governor of the universe ?

"Do you believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament contain a divine revelation ?

"[For consideration.—Do you believe in the aiding and sanctifying influences of God's Holy Spirit ?]

"Do you believe in the divine mission and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Son of God and Saviour of the world ?

"Do you acknowledge your obligation faithfully to endeavour to understand yourself, and to expound to others, the principles of the religion of Jesus ?

"Do you promise to study, and endeavour to promote, the peace, unity, and prosperity of the Christian Church ?

"Do you promise *submission to the authority of this Presbytery*, or that of any other Presbytery of this Body with which you may become connected, according to the laws framed for the discipline and government of our Churches ?

"3. The candidate having given *satisfactory* answers to these questions, and having *otherwise satisfied the Presbytery* of his fitness for the sacred office, the minister appointed to license shall then proceed to do so, in the following manner :—

"In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the sole king and head of the Church, and *by virtue of that authority which we exercise* as a Presbytery, we do hereby license you, A. B., to preach the Gospel ; and may the spirit of the Lord rest upon you, and make you sufficient for the work to which you are appointed.

"4. The Presbytery shall then enter in their book a record of the license."—*Constitution and Discipline*, pp. 16, 17.

In the Section relating to "Invitations," the following question is submitted for consideration :—

"Should the candidate, before the conclusion of his trials, be *required to give* to the Congregation a *definite written statement of his religious opinions* ?"—*Id.* p. 20.

The Section upon "Ordination" provides that—

"The day of ordination being definitely fixed, the Presbytery shall appoint members to preach, to discourse of ordination, to offer up the ordination

prayer, and to deliver the charge to minister and people. It is desirable that the persons appointed to these duties should be the senior and more experienced members of Presbytery.

"After the discourse concerning ordination, the following questions shall be asked :—

"Do you believe in one God, the Creator and Governor of the universe ?

"Do you believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament contain a divine revelation ?

"Do you believe in the divine mission and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Son of God and Saviour of the world ?

"[For consideration.—Do you believe in the aiding and sanctifying influences of God's Holy Spirit ?]

"Do you believe in the immortality of the human soul, and in man's future responsibility for the deeds done in the body, whether they have been good or evil ?

"The preceding questions having been *satisfactorily* answered, the officiating minister shall then address the candidate for ordination [or installation], in these words :—

"Do you desire for your own satisfaction, or that of the members of this Congregation here assembled, to say anything farther, with regard to your views of Christian doctrine, or to make any statement in relation to your purposes in entering upon the solemn work of the Gospel ministry ?

"Here the candidate, if so disposed, is to make his statement.

"Should the candidate make a statement of a *satisfactory* kind, the officiating minister shall further address him," &c.

"Do you approve of Presbyterian Government and Discipline, as it is recognised in the Remonstrant Synod of Ulster ; and do you promise to submit yourself thereto, and to support it to the extent of your abilities, so long as you shall remain in connexion with that Body ?

"Do you promise, as far as in you lies, faithfully to discharge all your duties as a member of this Presbytery, and to fulfil its appointments ?

"The candidate *having satisfied the Presbytery*, shall be ordained to the ministerial office by prayer, and the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery." —*Ib.* pp. 23, 24.

It will be seen that it is here proposed to require all Candidates for "License" and "Ordination," to submit to a variety of tests for the purpose of satisfying Presbyteries of the soundness of their theological opinions. It is with deep sorrow I contemplate the possibility of the Remonstrant Synod adopting any such measure. It were to revert to the old Creed and Test System, with all its evils, against which our Synod is itself a protest. It were to betray the cause of religious liberty in the house of its trusted friends, and to enter into a league of alliance with its enemies. It were, in fact, to repudiate its own Fundamental Principles, and to proclaim itself a failure.

In order to establish these positions, our first object is, to shew that the proposed scheme necessarily involves the adoption of the Creed and Test Principle. That the testing of the theological opinions of all future Candidates for the ministerial office is contemplated, is manifest from the passages quoted. That such testing would operate, generally, as a Creed, there is no room for doubting. It would be, to all intents and purposes, a Creed ; and, in some respects, more objectionable than any formal Creed embodying the leading doctrines of our Church.

It is, in principle, a Creed. Its evident object is to obtain a full, public, and deliberate declaration of the Candidate's belief on theological subjects ; and the character of that declaration is almost as exactly defined by the leading questions proposed, and the known sentiments of those whom he is required to "satisfy," as if, instead of being permitted to clothe his answers in his own language, the Candidate had submitted to him, for adoption, an authorized formula containing the doctrines he is expected to profess. Prescribe a certain number of doctrines,—whether two or twenty, affects not our argument—and whether these are to be affirmed by a mere "Yes" to the questions of the Presbytery, or to be embodied by the Candidate in an oral or written declaration, or to be subscribed in a Creed prepared by the Church, the act of professing, whether as regards the Church or the Candidate, is virtually the same in each instance: the Church wishes to test the soundness of the Candidate's faith, and the Candidate submits to be tested, as really when he answers "Yes," as when he subscribes his name.*

It would operate as a Creed, in promoting fixity of opinions. It is notorious that Creeds possess a power—whether for good or ill we say not now—of perpetuating themselves. Though not absolutely insurmountable, they yet constitute a powerful barrier to the progress of opinions unsanctioned by their authority. Breathing the spirit of the Creed System, and being, in effect, the adoption of a Creed, the scheme before us would necessarily exert a similar influence. We are taught from childhood to respect and maintain consistency, and we learn to dread even the imputation of inconsistency as something terrible,—and, particularly, in regard to religious opinions. Induce us, in youth, to make a public formal profession of our belief in certain doctrines ; and doctrines so acknowledged at once become ultimate. A religious opinion, once it has been openly and solemnly professed, is, generally, an opinion for life. All reading and reasoning must go to confirm it. Should maturer deliberation chance to shake the foundations of our Creed, we feel as if all were wrong,—that we are in a dangerous condition of mind ; and we strive and pray for assistance to banish doubts and to restore and preserve the "faith" of youth.

Our new Code not merely requires Candidates for the ministry to make a public declaration of their belief in certain doctrines, but it also provides machinery, obviously designed to secure adhesion to

* I am fortified in this position by the opinion of Dr. Montgomery, who, in his eloquent speech, in the General Synod at Strabane, in 1827, observed:—"What a man declares, at the bidding of his fellow-man, he *virtually subscribes*;" and, as expressing his views upon the general question, I may here quote the remainder of the paragraph. "Now, I do say, without fear of rational or scriptural contradiction, that any body of fallible men, who demand assent or subscription *to any declaration or test of faith*, in human language, under the fear of any penalty or the hope of any reward, are *trenching, not merely upon the fundamental principle of Protestantism, 'the right of private judgment,' but also upon the sacred prerogative of the great head of the Church.*"

those doctrines. It proposes that every young minister shall be required, before being ordained, to prepare and deliver up, for safe keeping, a "*definite written statement of his religious opinions.*" As to the object of this, there cannot be a second opinion. It says, in effect, to the young minister :—"Here is your programme of principles—your confession of faith. To this we hold you. To retain your position, you must adhere to the opinions herein set forth. Depart from them, and you forfeit your place." What more could the thorough creed sytem attempt in this direction? And to work this machinery, Presbyteries, or Commissions of Synod, possessing inquisitorial powers, are to "hold regular stated visitations of the several Churches under their care, in addition to other occasional visitations which special circumstances in any Congregation may render expedient."—*Constitution, &c.*, p. 29.

I have said, further, that the proposed scheme is, in some respects, even more objectionable than a formal Creed. It is deceptive; for, while professing to allow the right of private judgment, it seeks, at the same time, to keep the exercise thereof under Church authority; and though it does not presume to openly cancel our charter of liberty, it, nevertheless, indirectly aims at seriously abridging our Protestant privileges and Christian freedom. It fails, besides, in accomplishing the only useful purpose, perhaps, of a Creed,—which has, at least, this advantage, that it serves as a programme of Church principles. The plan under review is not sufficiently affirmative even for that purpose; whilst, by exposing conscience to the mercy or the malice of caprice, it is more objectionable than a real Creed. Set forth a Creed, expressed in unambiguous terms, and the Candidate knows what he has to deal with. But here all he knows is, that his answers to the testing questions of the Presbytery, and his statement of religious opinions must be "*satisfactory*,"—which gives the option of any degree of leniency, or any amount of conscience-probing severity.

And in case of change of opinions,—with a recognised Creed, it is a comparatively easy matter for a Church, openly and fairly, to deal with its members; but here, though the preservation of Orthodox purity is unquestionably intended, that object can be promoted only by the agency of a secret police, and the exercise of inquisitorial power, which are both abhorrent to the inherited and cherished sentiments of our Church. A professedly free Church, striving to secure uniformity of belief among its members, on even a few leading questions in theology, is about the most despotic and unscrupulous Church possible. The man whose opinions a secret conclave adjudges unsound, cannot be brought up, tried by the Creed of the Church, condemned and dismissed; and yet he must be got rid of. There is nothing for it but to secretly poison public opinion against him, by dark insinuations to excite and strengthen suspicions, to put him down by calumny and petty persecution. The Independent Church

in England, by its "Rivulet" controversy, now so famous, affords a striking case in point,—a Church, free and independent by profession, and yet possessing a keen scent for heresy in its members,—hounding down free inquiry and the right of private judgment when they do not conduct to the conclusions licensed Orthodox by a dominant majority.

Such, then, being the nature of the new Code—a Creed in principle, worse than a Creed in practice—there are several weighty objections, which I shall now briefly state, to its being adopted, in its present form, by our Synod.

History pronounces, emphatically, against the Creed System. The process of Creed-making, as exhibited by the various Councils and Synods of the Church—from the Council of Nice to the Synod of Strabane—is itself an argument against Creeds. The process has been conducted, usually, under influences very adverse to the interests of truth. In their formation, Creeds have, generally, been intimately connected with, and indebted to, the baser passions of man's nature. They have taken form amidst strong prejudices, bitter hostilities, angry discussions, and, sometimes even mean intrigues.*

Originating under such influences, the Creed System has been, in its operation, an evil genius in the world.† In every age, its path

* In his *History of the Church*, Waddington informs us that, in the religious controversies of the 3rd and 4th centuries, human passions "*broke loose and proceeded to every excess*;" and that "*fraud and forgery*" were readily admitted "into the service of religion."—p. 89. In the following terms, borrowed from Dr. Jortin, he commences his account of the celebrated Council of Nice, which first voted into the Christian Church the doctrine of Christ's Deity:—"The Bishops began by much personal dissension, and presented to the Emperor a variety of written accusations against each other; the Emperor burnt all their libels, and exhorted them to peace and unity."—p. 92. The third General Council, called for a kindred purpose, and to which the presiding patriarch had brought with him a "number of robust and daring fanatics, who acted as his soldiery," to assist the Council in coming to an orthodox conclusion, "after some sanguinary tumults," was "dismissed by the Emperor in these words:—'God is my witness that I am not the author of this confusion. . . . Return to your provinces; and may your private virtues repair the scandal of your meeting.'"—p. 182. Of a Council held at Ephesus, to settle some disputes respecting the nature of Christ's person, the historian writes:—"The tumults which had disgraced the Church in 431 were repeated with some additional brutalities in 449," and the Assembly, after deciding the question, separated, having acquired for itself the title of "*The Assembly of Robbers*."—p. 184. It were easy to multiply quotations of a similar character.

+ Even members of Subscribing Churches have not failed to see and acknowledge the evils of the Creed System. Archbishop Wake observes:—"It has never gone well with the Church of Christ, since men have been so narrow-minded as to mix the controversies of faith, with their public forms of worship; and have made their liturgies, instead of being offices of devotion to God, become tests and censures of the opinions of their brethren." Bishop Stillingfleet says:—"Without all controversy, the main inlet to all the distractions, confusions, and divisions of the Christian world, hath been by adding other conditions of Church communion than Christ has done."—

has been marked by strife, persecution, desolation. It has scattered the seeds of discord in peaceful communities, and inspired hate where love alone should reign. It has invariably opposed itself to the progress of enlightened views, whether in science, politics or religion ; and, to the extent of its power, laboured to extinguish all thought which it could not render subservient to its own purposes. Of despotisms it has been the most despotic, the most intolerant and persecuting. Oh ! if the dungeons and Smithfields of Christendom could but speak, its doom would be instantly sealed. Even its most devoted friends would conspire for its destruction.

But while, in general, the higher elements of civilization have suffered much, Religion, in particular, has been seriously injured by the Creed System. The natural tendency of a Church Creed is to depreciate the supreme importance of elevated virtue—piety in the heart and holiness in the life, and to render mere *opinions* the all important. Its great aim is to make men orthodox. Hence, in the past, religious persecution was so uniformly directed against heresy, which would not be tolerated even in the most virtuous,—whilst “orthodoxy” covered a multitude of sins. In the present day, the evil effects of the tendency in question are but too obvious. Under its influence sound believing takes the place of holy living. Only the most valueless parts of religion readily adhere to it—the froth and the sediment of the divine stream, high-wrought ecstasies and low-motived moralities, which, though approved by Churches, seldom stand the test of the market-place. Redpath and the Baronet Banker found no moral difficulty in combining with a first-class religious character the most nefarious villainy ; and these men are representative, not exceptional ; and representative, too, of a very large class,—a class which shall continue so long as saving truth is embodied in a Creed to be believed.

The Creed System, in its effects upon Ministerial Character, is, further, in a high degree prejudicial to the interests of religion. It is, obviously, of the utmost importance that the professional Teachers of the divinest science, even that of religion, which regulates the affections and fashions the life, should possess, at least, every necessary

And Bishop Jeremy Taylor believes that—“Bodies of Confessions and Articles do much hurt, by becoming instruments of separating and dividing communions, and making uncertain and unnecessary propositions a certain means of schism and disunion.” Richard Baxter writes :—“Two things have set the Church on fire, and been the plagues of it a thousand years ; 1st, Enlarging our Creed and making more fundamentals than God ever made ; 2nd, Composing, and so *imposing*, our Creed and Confessions in our own words and our own phrases.” And Dr. Montgomery, as might be expected, feels very strongly on this subject : in his speech at Strabane, he says :—“*So truly do I detest all human interference in matters of conscience, and so awful have been its effects in the world, that were you this moment to lay before me a human Creed, every word of which I believe, I would not subscribe it, lest I should thereby sanction the interference of man, with the prerogative of the Redeemer.*”

qualification for faithfully and efficiently discharging the duties of their office. To the ministry of the present age, a considerable amount of intellectual culture is indispensable. The Teacher of religion should be acquainted with the principal departments of human knowledge, and particularly such as best reveal the laws of God and the nature of man ;—as unfolding the former, the physical sciences, and, as unfolding both, history, mental and moral science, and religion, are of peculiar and essential importance. But, over and above the most extensive literary, scientific, philosophical and theological acquirements, there is one qualification pre-eminently important, absolutely indispensable,—and that is *moral soundness*,—thorough integrity, high principle. If there be any defect, any unsoundness, here, what avail the most brilliant powers of intellect and the vastest stores of knowledge ! They but render their possessor more dangerous : the apostles' power is in the hands of Simon the sorcerer.

Now, the tendency of the Creed System is to sap this soundness, to undermine this integrity.* It discourages thorough honesty of principle, and rewards obsequiousness. For the clever, though unscrupulous, advocate it weaves its laurel crown ; for the true prophet it plaits its crown of thorns. It seeks to surround itself by a devoted body-guard, rather than to raise a band of high-spirited and noble souls, ever ready, with heart and hand, to engage in any service to which conscience may call them.

To produce Teachers of the latter class, a Church should put neither fetters on their feet, nor manacles on their hands. They should be left free ; and more,—taught to esteem spiritual freedom as the atmosphere which sustains the life and health of the Teacher's function. Free—yet bound ! bound by chains of responsibility and obligation to do all that in them lies, God helping, to comprehend and proclaim the “whole counsel of God.” Let this sense of duty be deepened, so that they may realize, as their own, the feeling of the Apostle, when, in view of the work to which he was called, he exclaimed,—“Who is sufficient for these things !” But, in all other respects, they must be free ; free to range the fields of truth, to climb to any Pisgah's summit to obtain a wider view of its domains, to dive into its ocean depths in search of its priceless pearls,—to gather, everywhere, fresh experiences of the divine, to enrich and bless the souls of men. What even if they do not always conduct us by the nearest path to the green pastures and the still waters ! Even in wandering, with such companions, we are safer than in marching

* Speaking of the subscription of the clergy of the Church of England to the 39 Articles, Bishop Burnet says :—“The greater part subscribe without even examining them, and others do it because they must do it, though they can hardly satisfy their conscience about some things in them.”—*History of his own Times*, vol. vi. p. 172. And Archdeacon Brydge makes the following observation :—“The unchristian art of confessing the faith without believing it is an art which, I am sorry to say, has of late been brought to its utmost perfection.”—*Charge*, p. 7.

rank and file, along the beaten and well-fenced highway, under the most approved guides, and subsisting upon the spiritual rations prescribed by a Creed, and served out by rule.

This freedom withheld,—and, instead of religious Teachers capable of assisting us in our spiritual culture and bringing us nearer to God, we have the mere Official who has learned to go through certain routine duties, with official formality and becoming gravity, and in which, perhaps, he neither is very deeply interested himself, nor deeply interests others; or we have the theological gladiator, drilled in all the arts of sectarian warfare, offensive and defensive, the advocate of a cause, learned, skilful, eloquent, fearless. Men so trained may serve the purposes of an ecclesiastical Corporation; but the interests of Religion they seriously injure. Nor is even the questionable advantage, for the sake of which Churches, at such an expense to religion maintain the Creed System, gained, viz.,—uniformity of belief. All history and the present condition of subscribing Sects clearly shew that Orthodoxy cannot be secured by means of the most stringent Creed.*

From the evil influences thus exerted by the Creed System upon Religion, generally, and upon the Teachers of Religion, in particular, I cannot look with favour upon that system; on the contrary, I believe that a Free Church could scarcely inflict a greater injury upon itself and upon Religion than by adopting it. It is, therefore, with the utmost pain, I witness the present attempt to introduce the Creed System into our Church. Well may our friends on the other side of the Channel, look with sorrow upon the attempt, and warn us to beware; and well, too, may the advocates of Creeds rejoice at the position we now occupy.†

* As to the efficacy of Creeds in repressing heresy, the following opinion was given by the Rev. James Carlile, in his examination on oath before the Commissioners of Education:—"I do not look upon the signature of a Confession of Faith as at all a guard. It is rather sometimes a cloak. . . . It was when the Synod of Ulster was most vigorous in requiring signature, that Arianism was advancing most rapidly among its ministers."—*Appendix to Fourth Report.*

† *The Inquirer* newspaper, (Nov. 15, 1856,) in an article entitled *Creed-making*, suggested by our late special meeting of Synod, observes:—"Most of our readers will peruse that report [an account of our proceedings] with surprise and regret. When it first came under our notice, we could hardly believe that we were reading the proceedings of a Convention which had once left the older Synod of Ulster, in vindication of the rights of free thought and conscience; and was composed of men who, in the exercise of those rights, had been led to embrace the principles of Unitarian Christianity. We rubbed our eyes as we read, and asked ourselves, is this that famous Remonstrant Synod which, under the leadership of Dr. Montgomery and Fletcher Blakely, stood up so manfully against a dominant Calvinism some thirty years ago, and seceded from the Synod of Ulster in a body rather than subscribe 'slave' to creeds invented by man. The *non-subscribing* Synod now debating whether it shall *subscribe* to a string of Articles drawn up by men! Surely there is some wonderful typographical blunder here. For Dr. Montgomery we ought to substitute the name of Dr. Cooke," &c., &c. "Is this the time for a Unitarian

In addition to the general arguments already adduced, there are special considerations which should fortify our Church against all attempts, from whatever quarter, to induce it to impose upon itself any yoke of bondage. Our Synod has its history, which though brief, is, nevertheless, full of instruction and warning to us. Its fundamental principles, its solemn baptismal vows, its public professions, its character, and the interests of religion, imperatively demand that, at any cost, it shall preserve undiminished, if not enlarged, its rich inheritance of freedom.

In the struggles of our fathers for Freedom of Conscience, our Synod had its origin. During the first quarter of the present century, liberal views on religion were making way in the old Synod more rapidly than suited the purposes of a dominant party; and in order to ascertain the extent of the "evil," and also, if possible, to arrest its progress, it was resolved, at the famous Synod held in Strabane, in 1827, to require of its members a declaration of belief in a certain theological dogma. But there were members of that Synod that had learned of Christ to "call no man master," and who prized their Protestant Rights and their Christian Liberty too highly to bend their necks to any human yoke. Though few in numbers, they were yet a host! for they were freemen fighting in freedom's cause, and, on the open field, "one chased a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight;" but the calling of the roll converted an ignoble defeat in discussion into an overwhelming synodical majority,—and that is an argument not to be met. The next year, certain Overtures, still more stringent, were passed. In 1829, the minority presented a Remonstrance, "requesting that the obnoxious Overtures should be repealed, and the ancient and salutary usages of the Church restored;" but the remonstrance was unavailing, and the minority, faithful to its convictions of duty, separated from the Synod, and in the spirit of its "Remonstrance" laid the foundations of a Church, in which men might worship God agreeably to the dictates of conscience, "without privation, penalty, or inconvenience inflicted by their fellow-men."

Convention to forge fetters for the Church, and after nobly vindicating its own religious liberties, to demand from others subscription to a number of articles on belief in the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit, and the ecclesiastical authority of a Presbytery? . . . We must be permitted to warn our Irish brethren that, if they carry out this new system of ecclesiastical discipline, they will lose the sympathy of the English Unitarians, who are even more strongly attached to the principle of non-subscription to human creeds and tests than to the definite principles they have attained in virtue of their religious freedom." And the *Banner of Ulster*, (Nov. 6, 1856,) in an article upon the same subject, says:—"The proceedings of this Body possess more than usual interest, and seem to indicate that some of its most influential members have discovered the sandy nature of the foundation on which they have hitherto attempted to build. Not only is it proposed to impose a test of orthodoxy," &c., &c. "We trust Dr. Montgomery will not be deterred by the charge of inconsistency to which he lies open from following the new and better light which has begun to dawn upon him."

At its first meeting, in May, 1830, the new Synod was inaugurated by the President (the Rev. W. Porter), in the following terms :—
 “We have come together to lay the foundation-stone of a temple dedicated to RELIGIOUS LIBERTY—a temple under whose ample dome, every individual who chooses to enter will be allowed to worship, in his own way, the one God and Father of all. * * After years of patient endurance, we have succeeded in throwing off a yoke which was by no means easy—a burthen which was far from being light. We have emancipated ourselves and our congregations from a state of spiritual thralldom, and established our claims to those invaluable immunities wherewith Christ intended to make mankind free. The privilege of FREE AND FEARLESS INQUIRY, is the ground-work of the Church we are now preparing to build; ‘PROVE ALL THINGS’ will be the motto inscribed on its front in characters of gold.”* And is it possible that, ere the grass has quite covered the graves of the founders of that Church, yea even while some of them still survive, we should, even for a single moment, entertain the idea of forging fresh chains for the spiritual enslavement of ourselves and our posterity? Forbid it, gratitude, integrity, shame!

The Remonstrant Synod should consider, besides, what is due to its Position, also, as a recognised representative and exponent of certain principles. It has deliberately proclaimed itself a Non-Subscribing Body.† Its original Constitution‡ is, throughout, entirely opposed to the Creed System. In its union with the Synod of Munster and the Presbytery of Antrim, it forms the “Association of Irish Non-Subscribing Presbyterians.” It has thus publicly undertaken the co-guardianship of the principle of Non-Subscription, and it is its bounden duty to do all that in it lies to protect that principle,

* *Bible Christian*, Vol. I., p. 246.

+ “You must keep in mind that we are gazetted before the world as non-subscribers to all human tests.” From a letter to Synod in reference to the new Code, by the venerable Fletcher Blakely, whose name is a synonym for integrity, and the latest effort of whose pen has been devoted to the support of those principles of religious liberty of which he has been so long the consistent and zealous advocate.

‡ Articles III. and IV. of the Fundamental Principles of the Remonstrant Synod, are as follow :—“III. That all exercise of Church power, which attaches temporal rewards to the profession of one class of doctrines, and temporal penalties to that of any other, is contrary to the Holy Scriptures, directly calculated to undermine that sincerity, without which, no profession of faith or form of worship can be acceptable unto God.

“IV. That the imposition of human Tests and Confessions of Faith, and the vain efforts of men to produce an unattainable uniformity of belief, have not only tended to encourage hypocrisy, but, also, to restrict the sacred right of private judgment, to lessen the authority of the Scriptures, to create unrighteous divisions among Christians, to sanction the most barbarous persecutions, to trench on the natural and civil rights of man, to place undue power in the hands of the few, to throw a shield over the time-serving, to expose the honest to injuries and persecutions, to perpetuate errors in almost all Churches, and to prevent that free inquiry and discussion which are essential to the extension of religious knowledge.”

alike from the attacks of open enemies and the treachery of faithless friends. At present, the Creed System is passing through a severe ordeal. In almost all Protestant subscribing Churches, there is a heavy strain upon it which it cannot bear much longer. And is it at such a time,—when the inadequacy of the Creed System is daily becoming more evident even to its friends, and Protestant Christendom is anxiously labouring after a true solution of the Church Problem,—that we are to proclaim to the world that a thoroughly and consistently Protestant Church is an impracticability—that our attempt to realize it is a failure! If this be our resolve, then the sooner we vacate the trust we have betrayed the better, and leave to the care of more faithful men the cause we desert and the memories we dishonour.

We may be reminded by the advocates of the proposed measures that a Free Church may be exposed to dangers of a serious kind from quite an opposite direction—that liberty may be carried too far, and that it is necessary to guard against such an issue. To this I reply that the remedy suggested is quite inadequate. When Three thorough Creeds and Thirty-nine Articles are not sufficient to keep back the tide of free thought in the Church of England, think you that our mongrel makeshift of a Creed will be able to set it bounds? And, even were it adequate, it is not proper to apply it. I adopt the sentiment of the minority in the Strabane debate upon a similar question, and say (with Rev. John Mitchel)—“The passing of this measure is laying a foundation for hypocrisy; and I declare before God, that I would rather see in this Body ten ministers unsound in the faith, than one hypocrite.” But I believe in the fullest freedom. It may, occasionally, exhibit very eccentric movements, but only for a moment. The truth-loving soul, if free, will not long miss its aim. Besides, even were the drawbacks to the fullest exercise of the Right of Private Judgment more serious than they are, we cannot get rid of them without consenting to part also with our freedom itself. They are the dark shadows of the tree of Liberty: to remove them we must cut down the tree itself.

Moreover, I confess, I have learned to be suspicious of any Church, seeking to extend its spiritual authority over its Members,—no matter how small may be the encroachment attempted. Even the gigantic Papal edifice had a small beginning, and was raised by slow degrees. To guard the young against the insidious power of habit, there is a Swedish fable which tells of a little Fay that appeared day after day, among the children of men. In their moments of leisure it was always present; and as it was all gentleness, mirth and gaiety, they dreaded no danger from its agreeable companionship. In its gambols, it was seen to wind around them little threads; but, then, these were finer than gossamer, and so light that their weight was not felt. But, by and bye, they thickened and strengthened and tightened, so that what at first was as slender as the thread of a spider’s web, became a

heavy chain weighing the wearer down and defying his efforts to break it or shake it off; and the harmless little Fay that no one feared became the master of thousands whom it treated as the veriest slaves. Now, as such a Fay, with the history of the Church before me, I cannot help regarding ecclesiastical Corporations. While they are weak, they are all gentleness and meekness; but, give ear to their honeyed words, and, like the generous steed in another fable, you have speedily in the saddle a rider that will spare neither spur nor whip.

It may be urged that no arbitrary or despotic exercise of authority need be dreaded in our Church,—considering its antecedents and professed principles. Then, why seek to possess such authority? Why invest Presbyteries with inquisitorial powers? History warns us, at our peril, against placing unnecessary authority in the hands of any Body. Young Dissent was as fair and promising as our fathers' Remonstrance; and Protestantism, in its infancy, what more hopeful and glorious! and yet each in its turn forgot the fair promise of its youth; and the freedom it demanded for itself and by heroic struggles gained, it denied to others,—the sword with which it fought and won the battle of liberty, it soon, alas! learned to wield in the service of oppression. Churches love authority. It is their weak point. And as you value your own independence and our Church's reputation, consent not to place in our hands the power we seek, or it shall be abused. It shall be exercised against yourselves.

In fact, to pass this measure were to abridge the Liberty and to encroach upon the Rights guaranteed to the Laity, at the time of the separation. It was one of the Reasons of Protest against the "Overtures" of the old Synod, that they must eventually trench upon the most valuable rights of the people in the free election of their ministers, inasmuch as their choice must be restricted to persons professing to hold the opinions approved by the Committee of Examinators. And considering such interference with the right of free election as an evil not to be endured, the Remonstrants, when laying the foundations of the new Synod, adopted the following as one of its Fundamental Principles:—That "we hereby, *publicly and solemnly*, GUARANTEE to the Congregations which are now under our care, and to those which may hereafter form a portion of our Church, the FULL, FREE, and UNRESTRICTED *exercise of their* UNQUESTIONABLE RIGHT to elect, in all cases of vacancy, ministers entertaining SUCH VIEWS OF DIVINE TRUTH AS THE CONGREGATIONS THEMSELVES MAY APPROVE.* Let the new Code be adopted, and that solemn engage-

* *Fundamental Principles*, Article X. Article XI. is as follows:—"That, to secure the exercise of this great privilege, to its fullest extent, the Ministers and Licentiates of the Church of Scotland, of the General Synod of Ulster, the Synod of Munster, and the Presbytery of Antrim, together with the Ministers and Licentiates of any other Protestant Church who may be sufficiently recommended to us, by their character and talent, their education and aptness to teach, shall be eligible to the vacant Congregations under our care."

ment is violated, and the Congregations which joined our Synod under the conviction that it would act up to its engagements, have been awfully deceived. In adopting the proposed scheme, our Synod would be doing the very thing it condemned in the older Body,—limiting Congregations in their selection of ministers to such candidates as submit to and pass the testing operations of the Presbytery. They cannot look for Candidates to the Synod of Munster, nor to the Presbytery of Antrim, nor to the Unitarian Church in England,—for all these are strenuously opposed to the Creed System in every form, and are closed against them,—so that notwithstanding their guaranteed freedom of election, Congregations are restricted in their choice of ministers to such as bear the Presbytery's "brand" of orthodoxy. Will the laity consent to be thus stript of their "unquestionable rights?"—and that by the parties who publicly and solemnly guaranteed to defend them.

Those who plead for the new scheme that it would form a Bond of closer Union among the members of our Denomination and tend to promote a fuller development of the religious life therein, put forth a claim which I greatly desire to be able to recognize. The professed object is a noble one; but the means proposed are wholly inadequate to its attainment. What that bond should be we cannot now delay to inquire. I believe, however, it must be sought for, principally, in the affections rather than in the intellect; not in unity of sentiment, but in unity of spirit,—in spiritual sympathies clustering around a common centre. That centre I take to be *the spirit, the life of Christ*. The adoption of such a principle has much to commend it, and I rejoice to observe that it is being received with much favour by our denomination, both at home and abroad. The periodicals* connected with our Body at home, at present afford gratifying evidence of the increasing popularity of this view; while, in America, it is gaining ground rapidly. The organ of the American Unitarian Association, declares its conviction "that questions about dogmas and forms belong to the past. * * The Church of the Future, as we believe, will have for its basis the warmest sympathy with the spirit of Christ, and the most earnest activity in Christian usefulness. * * Which Church best reproduces the spirit of Jesus Christ,—which encircles its members in its arms of brotherly love, engages them in generous and self-sacrificing works, rebukes the besetting sins of dogmatism and sectarian bigotry, lays the greatest stress on a life hid with Christ in God, and furnishes the best help for its acquisition? This is the Church which we believe is to prevail in the future, and that which a thousand waiting Simeons long to join."†

It thus appears that the proposed new Code is open to many serious

* See *Christian Reformer*, for Dec., Jan., and Feb.; and, particularly, the articles by the Rev. John James Tayler.

+ *Quarterly Journal*, (U. S. A.) Oct., 1856., p. 33.

objections ; that in fact it is such that it *must* not be adopted as it now stands. I trust the Laity of our Church will come forward* and assert their own “unquestionable rights”—that they shall give such expression to their sentiments of attachment to their Protestant Rights and Christian Liberties as shall secure the abandonment, now and for ever, of every attempt to impose upon them a yoke of bondage which in days gone by, neither they nor their fathers were able to bear.

WHERE THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS, THERE IS LIBERTY.

STAND FAST, THEREFORE, IN THE LIBERTY WHEREWITH CHRIST HATH MADE US FREE, AND BE NOT ENTANGLED AGAIN WITH THE YOKE OF BONDAGE.

* I know that there is a very strong feeling on the part of the Laity against those provisions of the Code upon which I have commented. But that feeling ought to assume a definite form. The Sessions and Committees of our Congregations should meet and adopt Resolutions condemning the proposed interference with their rights and liberties. In some instances this has already been done. The following has been adopted, unanimously, by the Committee of my own Congregation :—“Regarding subscription, in any form whatever, to Articles of Faith, as being opposed to the best interests of religion, and, at the same time, as inconsistent with the Fundamental Principles of the Remonstrant Synod; and having seen in the Draft Code of Discipline lists of questions proposed to be put to Candidates for License and Ordination with a view to test their soundness in the faith,—Resolved :—‘That we strongly disapprove of all such questions, and earnestly entreat Synod not to adopt any measures calculated, in any manner, to interfere with the freest exercise of the Right of Private Judgment in matters of Faith.’”

Before the unexpected adjournment of the November meeting took place, Synod had entered upon the consideration of the portion of the Code here reviewed. The following motion upon the subject was introduced by myself, and seconded by John Miller, Esq. :—“That, while recognising the right and duty of Congregations to satisfy themselves of the fitness, in all respects, of the persons whom they select as their religious Teachers, we believe that Presbyteries ought not, in matters of religious faith, to require anything of Candidates for License and Ordination beyond their professing themselves disciples of Jesus Christ ;—and that the Code be altered accordingly.” The discussion of this motion will be resumed at the March meeting.

